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DREAMS OUT OF DARKNESS

DREAMS
OUT OF DARKNESS
JEAN STARR UNTERMAYER



New York

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DEDICATION

(To Louis)

Take my heart in a book;

Take strength that is born of pain,

And take me again and again

In a sigh or a look.

Joy's come—it will abide—

Washed clean by unwilling tears.

I give thanks to the struggling years;

I have grown at your side.

For the privilege of reprinting many of the poems in this volume, the author thanks the editors of *The Century*, *The Bookman*, *The Liberator*, *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*, *The Measure*, *The Smart Set*, *The Broom*, *The Literary Review*, *The Double Dealer*, *The Menorah Journal*, "*The Enchanted Years*" and *An American Miscellany*—1920.

CONTENTS

I

- LAKE-SONG, 3
SINFONIA DOMESTICA, 5
ANTI-EROTIC, 7
FROM THE ROAD IN NOVEMBER, 8
A DEAD NUN SMILES AT TWO POETS, 10
MIST, 13
REBIRTH, 14
LITTLE DIRGE, 16
BERKSHIRE TWILIGHT, 17
THE OLD TUNE, 18
ON TEMPLES, 19
THE PASSIONATE SWORD, 21

II

- EVE BEFORE THE TREE, 25
CHILD AT A CONCERT, 37
A SOLDIER LISTENS, 39

CONTENTS

TO A WAR POET, 41

THE QUARREL, 42

FROM THE DAY-BOOK OF A FORGOTTEN PRINCE, 43

AN OBLIGATO TO BRAHMS, 46

LULLABY FOR A MAN-CHILD, 48

TWO AND A CHILD, 49

THE ALTAR, 50

GOthic, 51

III

BLUE BOOK-ROUTE 121, 55

NEW TRIBUTES, 56

GLIMPSE IN AUTUMN, 58

APRIL CONCEIT, 59

FORGET-ME-NOTS, 60

TAKE YOUR HAND OFF MY THROAT, BEAUTY! 62

IV

DURING DARKNESS, 65

THREE DREAMS

I. THE SILVER YOKE, 67

II. LOVE AND ART, 70

III. THE HOLY BAND, 72

LAKE-SONG

THE lapping of lake water
Is like the weeping of women,
The weeping of ancient women
Who grieved without rebellion.

The lake falls over the shore
Like tears on their curven bosoms.
Here is languid, luxurious wailing,
The wailing of kings' daughters.

So do we ever cry,
A soft, unmutinous crying,
When we know ourselves each a princess
Locked fast within her tower.

The lapping of lake water
Is like the weeping of women,
The fertile tears of women
That water the dreams of men.

SINFONIA DOMESTICA

WHEN the white wave of a glory that is hardly I
Breaks through my mind and washes it clean,
I know at last the meaning of my ecstasy,
And know at last my wish and what it can
mean.

To have sped out of life that night—to have
vanished
Not as a vision, but as something touched,
yet grown
Radiant as the moonlight, circling my naked
shoulder;
Wrapped in a dream of beauty, longed for,
but never known!

For how with our daily converse, even the sweet
sharing

Of thoughts, of food, of home, of common
life.

How shall I be that glory, that last desire

For which men struggle? Is Romance in
a wife?

Must I bend a heart that is bowed to breaking

With a frustration, inevitable and slow,

And bank my flame to a low hearth-fire, believing

You'll come for warmth and life to its
tempered glow?

Shall I mould my hope anew, to one of service,

And tell my uneasy soul "Behold, this is
good."

And meet you (if we do meet) even at Heaven's
threshold

With ewer and basin, with clothing and with
food?

ANTI-EROTIC

HOLD me so and press my head
Close to your shoulder with a gentle hand;
And do not wonder that this mild caress
Dearer to me than all your passion is.

For passion one can have from many men.
When a woman flames to the new life of Spring,
Men read the ardor and the dreaming in her eyes
As tributes to themselves—and burn to her.

But to be cherished as a child is cherished,
To be held as something incredibly dear,
This is like the delicate hopes of childhood,
Like waking from December into a sun-sweet
May.

FROM THE ROAD IN NOVEMBER

Is death like this:

The slow and quiet chill
That creeps up from the ground
And wraps the listless hands,
That numbs the closed lips and the drooping
 eyes
That open to gaze wishless
On shallow banks of snow?

To hear without thrill or sadness
The sounds of twilight,
The soft snap of breaking twigs,
The distant baying of a dog,
Winds urging on uncovered leaves,
And a little stream
That tattles incongruously of summer . . .

To realize the slant of shadowy hills,
To look again at the lighted house
Shutting in one's beloved . . .
And then to turn to the dark fields,
To go willingly into the deep sepulchre of
night.

A DEAD NUN SMILES AT TWO POETS

THE sun was smiling lazy smiles
And crinkling all the winter weather;
He planted Spring for miles and miles
And drew two women friends together.

Each sauntered from her separate hill
And, when they met, walked by the river,
Discussing modern love until
Their pliant hearts began to quiver.

"Now Art impinges on our lives
And complicates our strange position;
We baulk at being maids or wives,
Intolerant of all tradition."

“Oh, had I lived in Sappho’s time,
Then Beauty had its proper setting! . . .”
“Ah yes, or in old Egypt’s prime—”
Parried the other, tense and fretting.

The sun with manly mischief beamed
Upon each brow till it grew moister;
He meant to force these two, it seemed,
Into a cool, adjacent cloister.

And through a crack in its dim room
He touched a spot, with shining finger,
Where, smiling even on her tomb,
A sleeping lady made them linger.

With hands that clasped a rigid cross,
She, who forswore both Art and Eros,
Now drily seemed to mourn the loss
Of what had made her life a hero’s.

She, who withstood the chill routine
 And smothered all her warring fires,
Seemed from the past to intervene
 And smile at their perturbed desires.

They held communion there, these two,
 With wisdom hidden from the sages,
And from their carven sister drew
 A solace, strengthened by the ages.

So from this cryptic face and keen,
 Each woman carried curious trophies;
Bearing them through her life unseen,
 To flaunt them only in her strophes.

MIST

THERE is a mist over this lake.
It shrouds the colors and the sounds as well;
It is wrapped over the hills like a strong veil
It blurs the patterns that the pine-trees make, lace-
woven over the sky.

Old Sun, you can not pierce it;
As I look at you, you seem no more than a brightly-
cloudy glass sphere.
Little birds, your chirring is dull . . .
A cow-bell, clanking in the woods,
Has the muffled music of minor thirds.

Oh mist, you have lessened everything.
Even my longing is choked within my breast;
I can find no song for it.

REBIRTH

LET us lay aside the memories of old love
Like the garments of our childhood.
They have a beauty and young grace,
But they do not fit us any more.
We have grown bigger and we shall be clothed
In a grandeur fitting our destiny.
You have found me and I you,
And all the bright and ragged past
Is gone.
Not through passion or delight
Nor by an easy way.
But through red pain and struggle, sanctified by
tears,
You have come—
Not to me but to what I stand for.
You have revealed my godhead to me

And by reverence have given me my heritage.
Now I can bear with you and for you,
Since you have found me
Woman—and Holy.

LITTLE DIRGE

AS hearts have broken, let young hearts break;
Let slow feet tread a measure feet have trod
before.

There gleams a pathway I shall never take;
Here dies a grief will trouble me no more.

Only swift feet may overtake desire,
Only young hearts can soar.
My goal is beckoning from a safe hearth-fire;
My youth is slipping out the door.

BERKSHIRE TWILIGHT

THESE autumn hills have their sadness.
So have I,
When a shadow crosses my spirit
And I neither live nor die.

Evening drops over their peaks
And chars their flame.
Their color sifts into grayness.
With me it is the same.

THE OLD TUNE

I PRAY thee send thy arrows, Spring!
I'll court and welcome every sting;
Thy silver javelins of rain
That prick my lethargy to pain.
Behold, I let my garments slip
And bare me to thy windy whip,
Nor care if thy approach be rude
So that thou pierce my torpitude.
See, I am bound in ice and frost,
A frozen thing, and well-nigh lost.
O quicken thou my blood again,
Though it be ecstasy of pain.
Thy keenest thrust I beg thee give
Only that I may know I live.

ON TEMPLES

TELL me:

Why do men make crypts of stone
To snare a living God?
Has he not made him for his own
A temple far more beautiful,
Whose ceiling is no static blue,
And the walls of which shine with no
ephemeral gilt,
But are fashioned of quivering green
That fades only to bloom again,
Even as the word of the Lord?

And tell me:

Do these bought singers reach his favor?
And is his ear arrested by these paid praises?
Or are they not as hired mourners

Whose wailings measure the pulse not the
pulse of the bereaved?

Is there no real singer among us?

Is there no one who must celebrate our
hungers and our feastings

And make a mellow music for God?

And is there no dancer who, with leaping joy
and drooping sorrow,

Will show our state to the eyes of our Father?

And are there not many—yea, millions—

Who will make living works

That will invite the Almighty

So that he will come down and dwell in them?

THE PASSIONATE SWORD

TEMPER my spirit, oh Lord,
 Burn out its alloy,
And make it a pliant steel for thy wielding,
 Not a clumsy toy;
A blunt, iron thing in my hands
 That blunder and destroy.

Temper my spirit, oh Lord,
 Keep it long in the fire;
Make it one with the flame. Let it share
 That up-reaching desire.
Grasp it, Thyself, oh my God;
 Swing it straighter and higher!

EVE BEFORE THE TREE

PROLOGUE OF LIGHT:

*We are the spears of light—piercing, stabbing.
The ribbands of sun are we—swaying, blinding.
We free the cloud-swaddled earth; we float
Through darkness. We dazzle as the morning.
We press you, Eve, we push you forward.
Oh, Eve, we bewilder your eyes.*

EVE

It is so cold. The little winds of dawn
Clutch at me when I pass as though
The chilly fingers of a child unborn
Would check my purpose. Rather had I stayed
Comforted and close in Adam's arms,
Had not a hunger keener than the flesh

Driven me here.

I am so young and so afraid,
Yet do as I must do . . .
The light here is so green and gray
And the bulging trees seem more like lowering
monsters
Than the friendly shelters of the day—
All except this that glows and trembles
And beckons with pale fire.

VOICES OF DARKNESS:

*Eve, Eve, withhold your hand;
Slacken the bridle on your mind;
We dwell in comfort beneath the land;
We need no awakening. We are blind.*

*Eve, Eve, we beg you turn.
The answer that you hope to find
Inhabits not what you must spurn.
We live by darkness. Oh, Eve, be kind!*

EVE

I AM so young and so untried;
[26]

So new in a finished, moving world,
So haunted by a dream that will not shape
And so tormented by a blind desire . . .
And yet I hesitate to lift my hand,
To gather and eat of the Tree.

My life began with Adam. If there was life
before,
I have forgotten it, nor can remember
Father nor mother, sister, nurse nor friend.
I was born woman, shaped for one design :
As mate for Adam, treasury of his love ;
And to this purpose gladly consecrate
Whatever worth I have.
All vibrant loveliness that the cozening pools
Tell me at every visit I possess.
These for his rapture, his repose,
And the deep-swelling tenderness that stirs
All of my being when I look at him,
Gazing in wonder on his garden world,
Or lying so exposed in sleep
To the prying, envious elements.

VOICES OF THE WATER:

*Eva, Eva, Earth's troubled daughter,
We come from the troubled depths of water.
There where the sources of life increase,
We know you can never hope for peace.*

*Eve, though we come to you unbidden,
The secrets of life in us are hidden.
The apple will bring you no release;
Eva, your yearning will never cease.*

EVE

AND yet I falter and of late I go
With doubt and sadness to love's ritual,
Fearing the puzzling aftermath
When Adam sleeps, detached from love and me,
Somehow made free and separate
By that which binds me closer every day.
How many nights I lay on the soft earth
And watched with uneasy heart the arching
 moon
Make her slow progress to the sky's deep couch.
How blanched I felt, how full of quivering
 emptiness.

My wish reached out like vanquishing arms
To grasp and know some stabler mood,
Some firmer, more accessible ground
Whence I could understand, admit
And reconcile this difference in our love.

When I first woke in this delightful close,
Adam was bending over me, his eager eyes,
Rapt with a selfless worship, searched my soul.
His face, then, was my world—and all
The later, lesser miracles of earth
Were pale delights after Delight had gone.

In that first wakening I beheld
Neither the feathered sky cut through
With glittering dagger-shaft of sun,
Nor the nobility of trees, nor flowery mazes.
Nor was there bird-song, nor the ease of grass
Nor the faint poignance of falling water—
Just Adam's face shone down on me ;
Adam's dark face, that battleground,
Where all emotions strove with one another.
Worship, possession, tenderness and pain,

And, last, the supplication of a needy child.
This was the confirmation of my being,
Binding me to him with an unseen thong;
Charging my new-born soul with swelling
power,
Strong to endure through tossed eternity.

VOICES OF WARNING ANGELS:

Eva . . . Eva . . . Eva . . .
We call you in supplication.
Eva . . . Eva . . . Eva . . .
Our wings beat a warning thunder.
Eva . . . Eva . . . Eva . . .
Down from our heavenly station,
Forsaking realms of wonder,
Hear us beseech you, woman:
Lift not your hand to touch!
A curse is on that human
Who seeks to learn too much.

EVE

THEN Adam touched with timid hand
The rippling mantle of my silken hair

And with a cry, half sob, half clarion,
Gathered me up and held me to his breast
With a tenderer, more reverential touch
Than that he gives to flowers.
Forth with sweet, cautioning words
He led me through this tangled green,
Naming for me the beasts and flowers,
The birds, the insects and the trees,
But warned me with a sidelong, shivering glance
Of these curved branches through whose silvery
leaves

A rosy apple swayed and seemed to sing.
And Adam whispered, "O beware, my love,
Of the forbidden fruit of secret knowledge.
For thus to me a rigid word was spoken
In lonely days before you came to help me."

VOICES OUT OF EDEN:

Eve . . . Eve . . . Eve . . .
Fateful woman, groping child,
Paradise holds its breath. Perceive
The milky dove, the lion wild;

*The innocent and undefiled
Beseech and call you. Harken and leave,
Leave them their world untouched and mild.*

EVE

ALL through an idle season that was summer,
Day after day and hour after hour,
Adam was weaned from all his former wonder,
Having one thought—and that to be my lover.
The beasts were calling from neglected jungles,
The birds were wooing him from unseen branches,
The blossoms taunted with provoking perfumes,
But Adam only turned to my embraces.
And I was there to start and still his hunger,
To be his playmate and his soothing mother,
His lighted torch, his sweetly quenching water.
And I had joy while love held us encircled
As stars are bound within one constellation,
Until I felt a new life move within me
And heard the summons of the generations.

Then gradually as the vigilant sun
Relaxes his regard when night comes on,

Adam began to let his glances stray
Back to the world he knew before I came :
To court the indolent animals,
To mock the birds and hold discourse with these,
To finger curiously some new-found plant
Or gaze at his reflection in a brook.
Then when his tedium became too great
And when the pleasures of the day grew stale,
Adam would come where I awaited him,
Rehearsing his adventures one by one
And, with the accustomed hand and voice of love,
Awake those ardours in me that so lightly sleep,
Till soul and body yielded—and enthralled
I saw beyond the borders of this world . . .
Clouds etched with running lightning smote my eyes;
Infinitely stretched out beneath my feet;
Glories undreamed of in my calmer hours
Caught me and swept me into heaven itself,
Palpitant and rapturous through the night.

But Adam drank his cup of ecstasy
In one quick draught as a parched traveller would
So over-eager for the offered joy,
So headlong, he could scarcely savour it.

And then completed but left unimpaired,
Unscathed by that all-too-smiting blast,
Turned sighing softly from my restless arms
And slept—and left me to my chafing dreams.

VOICES OF GROWING THINGS:

*By the moist ground, by the humid air,
We are nurtured.*

*From the dumb seed, the stolid root,
We are quickened.*

*From the unconscious egg we are warmed and
brought forth.*

*From the mother, eager and dreaming, we are
delivered . . .*

*Therefore, Eve, young mother of nations,
You, who shall be the symbol of all women,
Bravest and most distressed of womankind,
Courage, courage in your fervent seeking.
Lift up your hand and rend the darkness, Eve.*

EVE

OH voices that compel my restive mind,
Are you my multiple selves confusing me?

Stray forces that must band themselves in one
Against the sinuous thought that tempts me so?
Enough. Let be. The way is suddenly clear.
A twisting pathway straightens at my feet;
My fate is beckoning from out the Tree.
My soul is set and nothing stays my hand.
I have come here, not for myself alone,
But for my children that shall follow me.
Not to know all, for that was never planned—
But to be welded in a common fire,
A white-hot radiance that will fuse
All of our rending differences, and bind
All men and women in the years to come.
For Adam's nature and my own, dear God,
Are different in ways beyond my sense,
And I can see frustration in his eyes
When I give voice to that which troubles me.
And though an unknown curse may fall on me,
Though endless punishments wait even now,
For puzzled generations I must know
What parts us even in the hour of love,
When flesh united to dear flesh is swept,
Surging in what should be a binding flood

Into aloof and separate mountain peaks—
Sundered and cool and alien, each to each.

Darkness and trouble close about me now;
But through the clouds, bewildered voices sound.
From the dreamed future they are urging me . . .
Let fall the burning sword, for I must know!

PROPHETIC CHORUS:

*The deed is done and is not done;
The fruit is tasted, the search begun.
Knowledge is yours and yet you do not know.
New Eves will come and hunger, even so;
Through countless centuries, a restless will
Shall drive new women toward fresh goals until,
In their instinctive wisdom, they will find
Knowledge can never be an end designed
But lies in searching. Women will ever grope
For that which buds and ripens in their hope.
And though the fruit of knowledge is not sweet,
Eve, it is good that you—and they—should eat.*

CHILD AT A CONCERT

SONATA, F MINOR. BEETHOVEN

(For Richard Buhlig)

BETWEEN that child's face seen half in shadow,
Where the dim lights touch into soft radiance
The rondure of temple, cheek and chin,—
Between that grave face,
As gently moulded as a melody,
What bond is there with the tumultuous sound
That burns and storms and rushes through this hall?

The child never stirs.
She is as unshaken as a marble Muse.
And under the artist's fingers,
From his fixed eye, through tensely breathing lips,
The *Apassionata* seems to surge;

To catch up in a divine rage
These shaken men and women,
A mocking giant careless of their fears—
A wielder of water, earth and air—
A scourger with brands of war—
A shimmering healer—
A cradling, compassionate God. . . .

And when the music dies away
And blinking faces shake off their awe,
Amid the bustle of departing crowds,
The child sits,
Lonely, grave, composed:
Moved and unmoving.

A SOLDIER LISTENS

(To Siegfried Sassoon)

WHAT was it came to distress you?
Who from the restless dead?
As you sat in the slanting shadows
With a heavy head.

The music pressed in among us,
Almost too much—
You quivered and seemed to be startled
By a known touch.

Even when healing cadences
Reached out to you,
Your face looked broken in pieces,
Shot through and through.

As you sat in the slanting shadows
With a heavy head,
What was it came to distress you?
Who from the clamoring dead?

TO A WAR POET

I STAND before your grief with hanging, futile
hands—

And long to bring you healing, piteous youth ;

Yet here the matter stands—

You must plow other lands.

These planted bones will bear no flower,

For you have garnered all their truth.

Go—in another place, another hour,

Find a new power!

THE QUARREL

WHY do you bring night into the room,
And why do you hurt me, you two,
With your heavy words that thud and thud
And blur the afternoon?
What avail your dark hatreds;
What golden bonds will follow after?

See how artless joy signals a truce!
For swifter than your racing angers,
Piercing the gloom your stubborn hearts created,
My pagan canary sends his yellow-bannered song,
Silencing your hate . . .

FROM THE DAY-BOOK OF A
FORGOTTEN PRINCE

MY father is happy or we should be poor,
His gateway is wide and the folk of the moor
Come singing so gaily right up to the door.

We live in a castle that's dingy and old;
The casements are broken, the corridors cold;
The larder is empty, the cook is a scold.

But father can dance and his singing is loud.
From meadow and highway there's always a crowd
That gathers to hear him, and this makes him proud.

He roars out a song in a voice that is sweet,
Of grandeur that's gone, rare viands to eat,
And treasure that used to be laid at his feet.

He picks up his robe, faded, wrinkled and torn,
Though banded in ermine, moth-eaten and worn,
And held at the throat by a twisted old thorn.

He leaps in the air with a rickety grace
And a kingly old smile illumines his face,
While he fondles his beard and stares off into space.

The villagers laugh, then look quickly away,
And some of them kneel in the orchard to pray.
I often hear whispers: "The old king is fey!"

But after they're gone, we shall find, if you please,
White loaves and a pigeon and honey and cheese,
And wine that we drink while I sit on his knees.

And then, while he sups, he will feed me and tell
Of Mother, whom men used to call "The Gazelle,"
And of glorious times before the curse fell.

At last he will sink, half-asleep, to the floor;
The rafters will echo his quivering snore . . .
I go to find cook, through the slack, oaken door.

* * * * *

*My father is happy or we should be poor;
His gateway is wide and the folk of the moor
Come singing so gaily right up to the door.*

AN OBLIGATO TO BRAHMS

WHAT is there in that group which moves me so?
It's commonplace, I realize all that.
A woman with a child on either side;
The mother, spectacled and fat.

The girl leans over, woman-wise so soon,
Alert and following the rolling themes
Her mother's finger traces. But the boy
Leans back, lost in his own dear dreams.

The mother rests the score upon her lap
And guides her daughter as the chords recur,
And when her son begins to droop, her arm
Curves out and draws him close to her.

Her arm is thick and unsymmetrical
And has no beauty known to song or art.
Yet that and music, dear—it is too much!
Take me away—it breaks my heart.

LULLABY FOR A MAN-CHILD

THE mountains waver through my tears,
Hush, my son—
The trees are bending at the knees
Like women broken by the years.
But you, my child, need have no fears;
Only for Woman, love has spears.
Sleep, my son.

So cuddle closer to my heart.
Dream, my son—
'Tis strange to think that you find peace
Here, where all stormy passions start.
But you need fear no ache or smart—
The pain is always woman's part.
Sleep, my son.

TWO AND A CHILD

DOES the Spring night call little boys
As it calls their wild young mothers?
But what can a child know of us—or others—
He has different joys.
A tree that bends and almost smothers
Two in the road who clasp and quiver,
To him is only a swing by the river—
One of his outdoor toys.

Put him to bed and let us flee
Out in the night with other lovers.
It will not be long till he discovers
What's known to you and me.
And then when a destined maiden hovers
Near for what only he can give her . . .
No! Close the door. What makes me shiver?
I will stay here. Let me be.

THE ALTAR

THERE were estrangements on the road of love:
Betrayals and false passions, angers, lusts.
There were keen nights and sated noons and trusts
Grudgingly given and held light to prove
Your self-sufficiency, your manhood's dower,
And mockery at my faith,—my single power.

There were renewals all along the way,
Of pledges and of weeping, new delights.
But no new meaning till that night of nights
You groped beyond to where my meaning lay.
And when you knelt to me you found me kneeling,
Proud of love's pain and humble to its healing.

GOTHIC

THINK not, my dearest, though I love to speak
 With windy pride about the rock I use
 To build with—oh, think not I would refuse
The gargoyles of your fancy. Every bleak
Cornice, and every archway I now seek
 To have them softened with your arabesques,
 Your graceful, happy scrollery on desks
On altars, lecterns, niches and on pews.

Though I may labor with a fervor that
 Is mediæval in its piety,
Completion finds my temples gaunt and flat,
Cold and erect. But in satiety
 Of sternness, I must turn to you, I find,
 To ornament the Gothic of my mind.

BLUE BOOK—ROUTE 121

THERE were sights to be seen at the flaming end of
summer

As we sped over the land like a flying scarf:
The kindled braziers of the mountain-ash
Swinging their wild greetings from tame door-yards;
Gypsy-dressed zinnias, spinsters in masquerade;
The tidy farmer, raking his first brush fire,
Himself an angular shadow beside its supple
 aliveness;
Obliging cows, arranging themselves in pleasing
 groups
Over the stone-sprinkled meadows;
Sun-bleached spread of a hill
And sun-dyed tapestry of an apple-tree;
Obsequious sun himself, Summer's gifted servant—
All these came running to the roadside
With mocking gestures of farewell.

NEW TRIBUTES

FAREWELL, you country beauties,
For the first time I have been your lover;
At last I know your perfections
And my heart leans back and lingers after me.

I'll give you tributes every one.
Not only to you, staunch hills ruffled in green,
Nor just to you, sly lake that quivers with hidden
 laughter,
But to the powdered blueberry as well
That flirts so primly with the passer-by.

Golden-glow, I salute your aggressive yellow;
I like the natural way you flaunt yourselves.
Scythe-swing of the golden Sun
That swathes the whole world into a glittering
 bundle;

And even your magic, Moon, you impostor,
Who look so young, although we know you old;
Low-humming bee and fidgety grasshopper,
And sandy sash of road—
For each your praises,
For I take something from all of you.
I go freighted with beauty
And stagger with wonder
Under a new burden.

GLIMPSE IN AUTUMN

LADIES at a ball

Are not so fine as these
Richly brocaded trees
That decorate the fall.

They stand against a wall
Of crisp October sky,
Their plumèd heads held high,
Like ladies at a ball.

APRIL CONCEIT

CAN this be Spring that floats such shadowy veils?
And what procession does she head?
And are the showery whitened apple-trees
The bouquets of a bride, about to be wed?

And are those dark hills standing in a row
The black-frosted ushers in her train?
And can it be the bride is sad this year
And hangs back weeping? What else, then, is the
rain?

FORGET-ME-NOTS

(For Amy Lowell)

WE walked through garden closes
Languidly, with dragging Sunday feet,
And passed down a long pleached alley,
And could remember, as one remembers in a fairy
 tale,
Ladies in brocade, and lovers, and musk.
We surprised tall dahlias
That shrugged and turned scarlet faces to the breeze.

Further still we sauntered under old trees, that
 bended with such a dignity
But hardly acknowledged our passing
Until at last—(and it was like a gift,
A treasure lifted from a dream of the past)
We came to a pond banded in lindens.

The bank curved under its crown of forget-me-nots;
They shone like blue jewels from the further shore.
And they were free! I could have had them all
To gather and to carry in my arms!
But I took only a few,
Seven blue gems,
To set in the gold of my memory.

TAKE YOUR HAND OFF MY
THROAT, BEAUTY!

TAKE your hand off my throat, Beauty;
Loose your clutch!
Unchain these prisoner-tears;
Let my crowded heart be dispossessed of its burden.
Why do you waylay me at such unsuspected corners?
Why blind and choke me
And lay your lash over my shoulders?
Release me and tell me calmly your bidding.
Let me go whole and unhampered
To carry out your commands.

Beauty,
Take your hand off my throat!

DURING DARKNESS

TAKE me under thy wing, O Death.
I am tired, I am cold.
Take me under thy wing, O great, impartial bird;
Take me, carry me hence
And let me sleep.
For the soil that was once so sweet is sour with rotting
 dead;
The air is acrid with battle fumes;
And even the sky is obscured by the cannon's smoke.
Beauty and Peace—where are they?
They have gone, and to what avail?
The mountains stand where the mountains stood,
And the polluted seas boil in the selfsame basin,
Unconcerned.

The beast in man is again on the trail,
Swinging his arms and sniffing the air for blood.
And what was gentle,
What bore fruit with patient pain, is gone.

Take me under thy wing,
O Death.

THREE DREAMS

I—THE SILVER YOKE

I GROW sick; I grow fainter and fainter
With picking out a footing
Among these tiny crags
That seem made of lava
Not wholly cooled.

Fainter and frightened;
Apprehensive of evil.
What end threatens?
What doom—demeaned—degraded?

I see dwarfed men,
Bald and ignoble,
The color of worms;
They glide into byways

As a worm glides.

I follow; I am drawn after;
Caught in a sick spell.
Through me, who may be blighted?
I follow; I am drawn after. . . .

And in a tent
Of dusky velvet folds
I stand aghast.
Rage rends me with a purpose!

A maiden lies helpless,
A naked maiden whose hair swirls down from
her plaintive head
Like wilful golden rivers;
A maiden whose tender shoulders are held down
Under a yoke of beaten silver,
While leering, wormlike men
Feel of her flesh and bargain for her beauty
With low and horrible cries.

Anger splits me apart.
I am a cloud—a gale—
An avenging storm!
O worms, you are dead.
O maiden, I bring you a cleaner doom!

II—LOVE AND ART

I LEFT the place where one had sung,
Misusing music
By placing herself before the song.
And anger at mankind
Battled with a reverence
That music, which is holy,
Wakes in the listening breast.

One of a murmuring crowd,
I walked down the long hill,
Hurt and yet eager;
Throbbing to offer myself
As servitor to all I loved.
And at the foot of the modern road
Stood an arch, vast and ancient.
And a voice in the shadow bade me look through it;
A finger, long, lean and grey pointed back.

I saw a landscape, mellow and magnificent,
Rising into the sky.
Rolling pastures, fit for the flocks of Lebanon;
Temples singing in the sun;
Purple rivers, companioned by trees
That praised God by their symmetry.
And I thought to myself:
This is the Past.

But the voice in the shadow said:
"This is Art.
This is not for you."
And again the finger pointed. . . .

I fell into a great weeping.

Unwillingly I turned and going further
I saw chalked on a naked hoarding
A crude sum:
"Love *minus* Art = Wife."
And I followed, with withering resignation,
To a place where I knew you waited.

III—THE HOLY BAND

It was evening and the light was golden,
Golden on the furry pasture,
Golden where a russet bantam
Drew with straining curve his supper
From the gilded, gleaming udder
Of a cow in golden shadow.
I bade you look,
For I was half ashamed
Of this disarray of nature
In the golden flood of evening.

We walked together, you and I,
To where blue-robed and stately women
Moved to unsung chants
Toward a bidden destination.

And loaves and honey
Were laid out in holy whiteness
Along their assured path.
And you would have eaten,
But I bade you stay your hand,
Too blithe for piety.
And I was swept along
As by a command, a sweet hearkening;
Easily cleaving the swaying band
Till I was leader—light and elated;
Balanced and propelled by a rhythm
Of myself and not of myself.

I moved as a ship or a bird;
And yet each footstep left its image
Graven in the hallowed rock.
On . . . on . . . till the walls were mirrors
And I saw, not myself, but a greater self,
Re-formed, transfigured, made secure;
Firm . . . and free.
And at last we came to the end
And I stood before bronzed doors,
Waiting for confirmation.

The doors swung back with the hum of rolling major
chords.

And I saw a patriarch teaching a child,
A patriarch suffused in washes of light
From high, unending casements.

He lifted his capped head
And nodded it, ponderous and shapely.
He looked at me as at one who is known and
expected—

And gave assent by a grave gesture.

Joy welled up in my heart,
Stronger than light,
Stronger than water,
As strong as song!
And I turned back
With tears as hallelujahs,
Back to the elder women.

GROWING PAINS

By JEAN STARR UNTERMAYER

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